

U.S. Department of the Interior

Bureau of Land Management

**Finding of No Significant Impact
DOI-BLM-NV-S010-2017-0131-EA
for the
PROPOSED RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN AMENDMENT AND
FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
FOR DRY LAKE EAST DESIGNATED LEASING AREA**

July 2019

Southern Nevada District
Las Vegas Field Office
U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

BLM	Bureau of Land Management
DLA	Designated Leasing Area
DOE	Department of Energy
DR	Decision Record
EA	Environmental Assessment
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
FLPMA	Federal Land Policy and Management Act
FONSI	Finding of No Significant Impact
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act of 1969
NOI	Notice of Intent
PEIS	Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement
PRMPA	Proposed Resource Management Plan Amendment
Proposed Action	Designation of the Dry Lake East Designated Leasing Area
RMP	Resource Management Plan
RMPA	Resource Management Plan Amendment
ROD	Record of Decision
SEZ	Solar Energy Zone
USC	United States Code
VRM	Visual Resource Management

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Finding of No Significant Impact

SELECTED ALTERNATIVE

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) prepared a Resource Management Plan Amendment (RMPA) Environmental Assessment (EA) (DOI-BLM-NV-S010-2017-0131-EA) to disclose and analyze the environmental effects of the Proposed Action. After review of the EA, the BLM determined that there were no significant impacts of the Proposed Action and prepared this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) to document the impacts and BLM's decision.

The EA disclosed and analyzed the environmental effects of the following actions:

1. Establishing the Dry Lake East Designated Leasing Area (DLA) for development of utility-scale photovoltaic solar energy generation and transmission facilities; and
2. Changing the Visual Resource Management (VRM) class of the DLA from Class III to Class IV, which will allow major modifications of the existing character of the landscape, through an amendment to the 1998 Resource Management Plan (RMP) as amended by the Programmatic Solar EIS ROD in 2012;

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

The EA served as an analysis of potential impacts that would result from the RMPA designating the Dry Lake East DLA. The impacts of potential future solar development in the DLA were initially analyzed within the *Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for Solar Energy Development in Six Southwestern States* (Draft Solar PEIS; BLM and Department of Energy [DOE] 2010). The EA is tiered to and incorporates by reference, the analysis of the effects described in the Draft and Final Solar PEISs.

Based on the findings discussed herein, I conclude that the Proposed Action will result in no significant impacts on the environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. No environmental effects meet the definition of significance in context or intensity as defined in 40 CFR 1508.27 and do not exceed those effects described in applicable land use plans. Therefore, preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS) to further analyze potential impacts is not required pursuant to Section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969.

This determination is based on the rationale that the significance criteria, as defined by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) (40 CFR 1508.27), have not been met. "Significantly" as used in NEPA requires considerations of both context and intensity.

In making this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), the following criteria have been considered, in accordance with the CEQ, 40 C.F.R. 1508.27.

CONTEXT AND INTENSITY

Context

Under NEPA's implementing regulations, "context" means that consideration of "the significance of an action must be analyzed in several contexts such as society as a whole (human, national), the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality" (40 CFR 1508.27(a)). The context of the EA analysis was determined to be at a local and regional

scale in Clark County, Nevada. The effects of the action are not applicable on a national scale since no nationally significant values were involved.

The proposed DLA is located approximately 10 miles northeast of Las Vegas, Nevada, directly east of the existing Dry Lake Solar Energy Zone (SEZ), which was designated in 2012 with the publication of the *Approved Resource Management Plan Amendments/Record of Decision for Solar Energy Development in Six Southwestern States* (BLM 2012). The Proposed Action involves approximately 1,800 acres of federal public lands adjacent to the Dry Lake SEZ and administered by the BLM. The EA analyzes direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of the Proposed Action using the appropriate geographic scope, which varies by resource and is described on a resource-by-resource basis throughout Chapter 3 of the EA. As identified in the EA, the Proposed Action would result in direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts both within the DLA and within the immediate area surrounding the DLA.

Intensity

Intensity refers to the severity of impact. The following discussion is organized around the Ten Significance Criteria described in 40 CFR 1508.27 and supplemental Instruction Memorandum, Acts, Regulations, and Executive Orders. The following have been considered in evaluating intensity for this proposal:

1. Effects

Impacts can be both beneficial and adverse, and a significant effect may exist regardless of the perceived balance of effects. The Proposed Action will have no direct adverse impacts. Potential indirect impacts from the Proposed Action include the following:

- Changes to the historic setting of the Old Spanish National Historic Trail (Old Spanish Trail)/Mormon Road;
- Future development of solar sites within the DLA could impact water resources as a result of land disturbance activities and water use requirements for solar energy technologies; such impacts could include alteration of groundwater recharge, ecological habitats, and ephemeral stream channels, which can affect flooding and debris flow resulting from high precipitation events;
- Future loss of recreational opportunities within the DLA resulting from future solar development;
- An increased risk of spread of noxious and invasive species;
- Potential degradation of habitats, thereby affecting wildlife and plant communities;
- Long-term loss of approximately 1,800 acres of habitat;
- The need for minimization measures, including translocation, for the desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*);
- Visual contrast with the existing landscape; and
- The potential need to develop new transmission corridors, which could result in further impacts.

The potential for adverse impacts will be reduced by including project-specific mitigation and conservation measures in project-specific NEPA analyses and by

adhering to the current BLM regulations, policies, and recommendations in the Final Solar PEIS (BLM and DOE 2012) and standard stipulations and mitigation measures of the BLM Las Vegas Field Office (Appendix B).

Beneficial impacts would include a minor reduction in the need for additional fossil-fuel electricity generation in the future. This reduction would not be significant. Additionally, there would be a beneficial impact from additional employment opportunities and increases in tax revenues in the surrounding areas.

2. The degree to which the Proposed Action affects public health and safety

The Proposed Action will not affect public health and safety. As the construction, operation, and decommission details for future solar development is not known at this time, project-specific NEPA analyses will consider the effects of future projects on public health and safety.

3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historical or cultural resources, parks lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas

Impacts on historical and cultural resources, parks lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, and ecologically critical areas were all considered during development of the Proposed Action. The Proposed Action will not result in significant impacts to these resources. As the construction, operation, and decommission details for future solar development is not known at this time, project-specific NEPA analyses will evaluate impacts on these resources prior to development in the DLA.

4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial

The Proposed Action is consistent with the types of actions that have occurred and have been described in the Draft Solar PEIS, Final Solar PEIS, the management objectives for the Dry Lake East SEZ, and is not considered to be controversial.

5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks

The environmental effects of solar energy facilities in and near the Dry Lake East DLA and the Dry Lake SEZ are well understood and do not involve any unique or unknown risks.

6. The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration

The Proposed Action would prioritize future solar development within the DLA. Impacts would be similar to the impacts described in the Draft Solar PEIS, Final Solar PEIS, the management objectives for the Dry Lake East SEZ.

7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant, but cumulatively significant, impacts

LITERATURE CITED

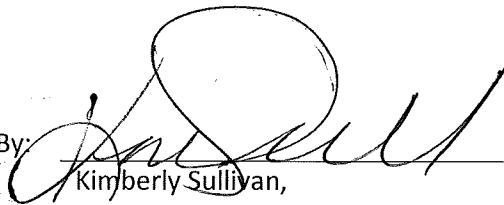
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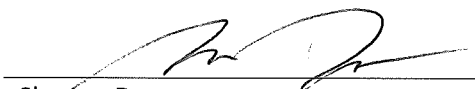


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7/23/19